



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Helena - Lewis and Clark
National Forest

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File Code: 1950; 1570
Date: December 2, 2016

Dear Forest User,

Today, I withdraw my March 1, 2016, Record of Decision for the Big Game Security Forest Plan Amendment for the Divide Travel Plan Area on the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (the Amendment Decision). With my withdrawal of the Amendment Decision, the existing 1986 Helena National Forest Plan big game standard 4(a) remains in place.

The Amendment Decision changed the existing Helena National Forest Plan big game standard 4(a) to a new standard for elk security precisely and solely for the six elk herd units that overlap the Divide Travel Plan planning area. The analysis for the Amendment Decision was disclosed in a Final Environmental Impact Statement that analyzed both the Divide Travel Plan and the Big Game Security Forest Plan Amendment. The Divide Travel Plan Record of Decision remains in place and is unaffected by today's withdrawal decision. The Divide Travel Plan Record of Decision, as disclosed in its Final Environmental Impact Statement, achieves positive benefits for big game security in each of the six elk herd units.

On August 25, 2016, some user groups filed a lawsuit in which they claimed the Forest Service violated the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Forest Management Act in issuing the Amendment Decision (Montana Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, et al. v. the US Forest Service, Case 9:16-cv-00110-DLC). The Forest is currently moving forward with Forest Plan Revision, therefore, I believe it is in the best interest of the public for me to withdraw the Record of Decision for the Amendment for the Divide Travel Plan Area and avoid the expense of tax payer dollars, extended staff work, and lack of general public engagement that would result from the litigation. Indeed, I expect that the Forest Plan Revision process will provide a venue for discussing the appropriate analysis of big game security and any change in management direction for the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan, which includes the Divide Planning area. Therefore, I believe it is the best interest of the public for me to withdraw the Amendment Decision.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM AVEY
Forest Supervisor

cc: Heather DeGeest; Erin Fryer; Jennifer Woods; Ray Smith; Christine Everett

